

Developing human potential to increase corporate competitiveness

BY JILL HAMLYN

THE VIABILITY OF SUCCESSFULLY DEVELOPING HUMAN POTENTIAL TO INCREASE CORPORATE COMPETITIVENESS HAS GROWN EXPONENTIALLY IN SOUTH AFRICA IN RECENT YEARS. THE INTRODUCTION OF THE SKILLS LEVY AND THE ATTENDANT FOCUS ON LEARNING INTERVENTIONS AND SKILLS ACQUISITION MAY HAVE SET THE STAGE REGARDING A WIDE RANGE OF DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS. THE NEED FOR ENHANCED LEADERSHIP AND MORE MATURE MANAGEMENT STYLES ACROSS ALL LEVELS HAS HOWEVER BEEN THE MAJOR CONTRIBUTORY FACTOR IN POINTEDLY FOCUSING HRD BACK INTO A MORE STRATEGIC ROLE. CULTURAL MANAGEMENT AS A CONSCIOUSLY DEFINED SET OF BEHAVIOURAL COMPETENCIES IS OVERRIDING THE NOW FATIGUED AWARENESS REGARDING MISSION AND VALUE STATEMENTS THAT HAVE BEEN PREVIOUSLY UTILISED AS A MEANS OF HARNESSING AND FOCUSING THE COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS OF EMPLOYEES.

By persuasion, or as a critical business objective, organisations are now tackling, head on, people development in general, with leadership development being the primary focus. Shaking both the expectations and modus operandi of the command and control managers, EQ in general and communication as a specific focus have been identified by many as being the critical skills needed in order to lead people towards tomorrow's success. For the HR Manager it is proving to be a window of opportunity in which the professionalism and strategic input of this human discipline can be both observed in action and directly measured.

Pioneering efforts to create and manage skills development plans are now being refined, with a number of clear future imperatives taking centre stage. These imperatives set the scene for HR development and management in 2005 and beyond.

They include:

1. An increased demand for leadership skills driven by the rapid change that has occurred in SA business, as well as technology and global communications;
2. A greater recognition of individual contributions and performance, as well as the conscious creation of a corporate culture conducive to the development of human potential ; and
3. A change in human values, which requires a personal

development path be run in parallel with a career development plan.

Those businesses that recognise the enormous opportunity for differentiation through the application of development initiatives within a more integrated model will create a more sustainable "people" based platform upon which future successes may rest.

TOP 10 PREDICTIONS FOR HR DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT IN 2005 AND BEYOND:

1. A more integrated model for HR management will become the norm in 2005, a welcome relief from the spasmodic and reactive initiatives of recent years. To ensure minimum spend and maximum output, companies will combine the individual career path and skills development interventions (made essential by the requirements of the Skills Act) into a single, integrated strategic HR initiative aligned with business objectives, the environment and the business needs;
2. Appropriate skills and management training will continue to ramp up, also fuelled by the requirements of the Skills Act, but attention will shift to the measurements of outcomes, creating a new ratings ladder for service providers and trainers - one based on how effective the training has been in attaining the desired outcome. This will necessitate greater input from HR professionals in the initial assessment of course content, individual and corporate requirements;
3. In line with this, personal executive coaching, which is gaining increasing acceptance, will be in greater demand. Leadership is one of the scarcest resources available today and the focus on uplifting leadership skills at all levels within companies is growing exponentially. Personal coaching combines the assessment of functional managerial abilities and leadership skills with an inherent focus on uplifting personal effectiveness;
4. Those companies that combine the upgrading of technical and functional skills within a clearly defined leadership development plan that focuses on a lucid organisational vision will be entering the field of true cultural management. This approach moves away from diversity management and other integrative development programmes that more often than not tackle problems as opposed to working on a long-term solution;

5. Diversity management will thus no longer be a separate field of endeavour for HR professionals as it mainstreams into leadership management. Social adjustment between cultures in corporate environments has taken place and individual ability to communicate will be the measure of personal and personnel inter-relations in 2005 and beyond;
6. Cultural management on the other hand necessitates the identification and definition of specific behavioural competencies that are needed to support and drive the business strategy. These will be rolled out throughout the business and directly contribute to the maturity and effectiveness of leadership development;
7. "Facilitation" will be the new watchword in management and people development. This is based on a growing understanding among HR professionals that a mind or voice not actively included in business decisions and activities is a resource wasted. HR will thus spend more time with people (both individuals and groups within the company) to understand needs, shortcomings, strengths and goals. A personal and career growth path will then be mapped in alignment with corporate requirement and strategies.
8. The job market is becoming more sophisticated and individuals are becoming meticulous about the management of their own career development. This will drive demand for positions that offer a variety of solid skills appropriation and advancement opportunities that will increase earning potential.
9. Salaries in various industries have dropped as the business environment bows to economic pressures. Companies thus have to do more with less, which means developing productivity through people. Job descriptions can be expected to become more detailed with performance appraisals gaining greater prominence; and
10. As companies realise the value of learnerships in building HR capacity, the uptake of unskilled or semi-skilled learners will increase, but the body of knowledge around the administration and management of such learners requires fine-tuning. This, in turn, is expected to lead to an increased registration of 18.2 learnerships defined as learnerships for employed workers - which may lead to lower HR costs being incurred in the interim, partly as a result of being able to claim a tax rebate per learner from the South African Revenue Service. Companies are therefore upskilling previously unskilled learners with valuable work experience which in turn aids the growth of the South African economy.

Jill Hamlyn is the Managing Director of The People Business Group of Companies (www.tpb.co.za)